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YUGOSLAVIA:

Dissolution Accelerating

Developments over the past week indicate Yugoslavia is likely to break up during the next year.

On Sunday Slovene voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum calling for gradual secession over six months if the republics cannot agree on a loose confederation. Slovene leaders want the West to recognize their republic's independence and say it may issue its own currency in February. Croatia adopted a constitution on Saturday that authorizes secession if a confederation accord is not reached.

The new governments likely to be formed in Bosnia and Macedonia also will undermine Yugoslavia's unity. The leader of Macedonia's strongest political party, the nationalist IMRO, has endorsed the result of the Slovene plebiscite. Leaders of Bosnia's Muslim and Croat nationalist parties, which together with Serb nationalists dominate the republic assembly, attended the ceremony marking Croatia's formal adoption of its constitution; Slovenia was the only other republic represented.

In contrast, Serbian Communists, calling themselves Socialists and opposing confederation, won 194 of the 250 seats in that republic's legislature in the second round of elections on Sunday. Communists in Montenegro, who also won handily in legislative elections, strongly back Serbia's opposition to loosening the federation.

Federal leaders have called for new talks on the country's future; they must act to extend the legal mandate of President Markovic's government, which expires on Monday.

Yugoslavia probably will break up in the absence of a confederal arrangement, and republic leaders' claims of flexibility appear to mask hardening stances. If the government collapses, only the military will be in a position to try to slow momentum of dissolution. The military may oppose Slovene and Croatian moves by trying to impose unity by force, splintering the Army along ethnic lines and hastening the country's breakup.

A largely peaceful and prolonged dissolution is possible if the military remains on the sidelines, but ethnic tensions are simmering and an outbreak of unrest could accelerate the secession process. Violent Albanian resistance to Serbia's rule in Kosovo Province is likely, and ethnic Serbs in Croatia probably will provoke another confrontation with the republic government. Communal relations in ethnically diverse Bosnia will deteriorate quickly if Serbs and Croats clash elsewhere or the Muslim-Croat majority sides openly with Croatia and Slovenia.

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